The Genius Who Loved Boys

How do we judge the life of Nobel laureate Carleton Gajdusek, whose brilliance saved countless lives across the decades, when he also violated one of the most universal of taboos? BY ROBERT DRAPER

INNOCENTS FOUND: Carleton Gajdusek in 1957, with children hospitalized with the deadly disease kuru in Papua New Guinea. His work there, a precursor of AIDS research, led to his winning the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1976.

"Every time you talk," accused the young man, "you bring up oral sex, and sex this, and your conversation—all the time!"

Replied Dr. Daniel Carleton Gajdusek, "Well, the answer is that sex is part of our studies and our work."

The doctor has washed his hands of us.

He lives out his exile on the outskirts of Paris, alone in a villa so vast and sumptuous that he is reluctant to let even his best friends know of its magnificence. Of course, they would share his appreciation for this ironic denouement to his saga, just as they would understand the villa's chief appeal to Carleton Gajdusek: its isolation. There are no intrusions here, unless one counts the property's many gardeners, who might now and again ponder the obese, bespectacled image of the 76-year-old Nobel Prize winner for medicine sitting at a desk in his secondhand clothes, thumbing through obscure texts and scribbling in his journals.

The property is lent to Gajdusek (pronounced *Guy*-duh-shek) by one of his many admirers; a French scientific institute provides him with an office, where he receives his mail. Letters pour in from friends, and occasionally there arrives some crass entreaty from someone wishing to write his life story or offering him a movie deal—proof that people do not know the first thing about him, which is that Carleton Gaj-

dusek has never felt the slightest need to explain himself, much less sell himself, to the public. But the bulk of his mail consists of requests for Gajdusek to lend his name to this research paper or lecture at that symposium. The world still demands the services of his genius, and if only to satisfy his restlessness, he indulges his suitors. He spent the entirety of March in Norway and all of May in the Netherlands, with stints in Sweden and Slovakia scheduled after that. But he will not come home to America. Carleton Gajdusek has washed his hands of us witch burners and stone throwers, for he believes we can view him only in grotesque caricature and harass him, just as the rabbles of past ages turned out Socrates, Galileo and Rousseau. He will, he believes, be among them someday. History, he insists, will situate him justly.

Comfortable though Gajdusek may be with his destiny, we do not abide such men comfortably. This is especially true if they are pedophiles. To the best of anyone's memory, no other Nobel laureate has ever pleaded guilty to the crime of sexual abuse of a child—an offense every bit as low and bestial as the honor of the Nobel is exalting, and therefore an especially venal perversity is imagined when a man as brilliant as Carleton Gajdusek is moved to have his way with children. That is the image he took no pains to alter a year ago this past April, when the aging pediatrician hobbled out of a Maryland prison after completing his one-year sentence. Serene in the belief both that he had done nothing wrong and that America would never concur, Gajdusek simply retrieved his passport from his attorney and that evening boarded a flight to Paris, where the work would go on.

His work was deemed critical to humanity—so wrote the many scientists who pleaded to the Maryland judge to exercise leniency at Gajdusek's sentencing. "His...scientific expertise and advice are constantly sought for understanding neurodegenerative diseases [such as] Alzheimer's disease." "The Mad Cow phenomenon...has to be solved, and it is Dr. Gajdusek's leadership that will produce such a result." "The world needs his work." Another chorus emerged, belonging to the fifty or so males whom, over the decades, Gajdusek had brought as youths from their primitive Pacific Island cultures to live with him in America. Gajdusek adopted them and devoted every last dime to their betterment. Several of his adopted sons would later marry, start families and then implore the bachelor doctor to receive *their* children in America. To the judge, they described their benefactor as almost Christly, at the same time disparaging the one Judas among them who had stepped forward and proclaimed himself a victim of sexual abuse.

Such is the state of Carleton Gajdusek's public record as he left it, and as he left us. Yet the shambles is not one of illogic and contradiction. It possesses its own peculiar integrity, thus revealing the first truth about Gajdusek's life: "My play is my work, or my work my play," as he would put it in his alarmingly candid journals—well over 50,000 pages of scientific field notes, cultural critiques and personal musings penned over the past forty-five years and housed in select libraries, though crucial passages have never before been presented to a mass audience until now. Where the vocational spilled into the personal, there one found children. The virtues of youth have forever been his obsession. His fascination with child development steered him into pediatrics, from which he often strayed into other scientific pursuits, but never for long. When traveling in the remotest corners of the world to document the customs of forgotten societies, Gajdusek inevitably gravitated to the children as his cultural liaisons—"obtaining from them," said the French anthropologist Jean Guiart, "information it would have taken him weeks to extract from their parents." Whether in the field or in the clinic, his love for the youths was evident to all. It happened that Gajdusek was quietly homosexual, yet sexual orientation was not the salient issue. "I can hardly conceive of sharing one's existence with a spouse," he wrote in his journal

HEALING HANDS: Gajdusek, *left*, examines a South Fore, New Guinea, child suffering from kuru. Gajdusek eventually concluded that the disease derived from ritualistic cannibalism.

Photographed by Bob Krieger - Art Director Nando Miglio - MRA Padova

in 1989. "That I can do with prepubertal children, working for no other purpose but for them and our relationship. With kids I can enjoy experience, demonstrate and play together, but not with adults."

Children—boys—instantly forgave him his emotional bumblings. As Gajdusek wrote, "The spirit of sex in youth is play...a playful game of fun and humor!" To such seemingly inconsequential overtures, he could comfortably respond. When he did so, discarding the sublimating mask of the concerned pediatrician, his manner was ever gentle; he was ever seeking to emulate the "nontraumatic sexuality" and "tactful secrecy" practiced between boys and men in the Melanesian cultures in which Gajdusek achieved his Nobel-winning breakthroughs while encountering a personal state of bliss that, back home, would surely invite questions. As he wrote nearly a half century before those questions were asked, "What I 'work' at thrills me, strengthens me, fills me with desire for more—and leaves me standing guilty before my fellow men, like a boy caught with his pants down."

Genius serves reason yet also defies it. Though for the past half century Carleton Gajdusek has been continually sought out by the global scientific community for his piercing intellect, he has nurtured a single quixotic mission: "to bring this age…in touch with its roots as they are still evident in so-called 'primitive cultures.'... That I shall do with the zealousness of a foolish, comic, inspired, ridiculous—yet passionate—pediatric apostle." One would become aware of this determination only by reading Gajdusek's journals, and few have done so. This has hardly devastated Gajdusek. Like Marcel Proust, André Gide, Jean Genet, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and other controversial diarists, he has had a wider

GAJDUSEK'S FINDINGS in New Guinea stunned the medical world.

audience ultimately in mind for what he views as "my most important legacy." He is, in his view, a man of history rather than the product and property of a single sorry era such as ours.

Yet there is a touch of the commoner to Carleton Gajdusek. His wardrobe was acquired at thrift shops. He has not owned a car or a home telephone for decades. Despite his friendly relations with royalty, diplomats and Nobel-sanctioned elitists, despite the carte blanche accorded him at every major medical institute on the planet, despite his mastery of nearly a dozen languages and his uncanny literary knowledge, he does not display a shred of condescension to those of inferior intellect. To Gajdusek knowledge is not power. It is adventure. He has been known to hop out of a car without notice, in midsojourn, to explore the terrain between points A and B on foot, saying to his driver friend, "I'll catch up with you in a couple of days." He has been heard to obsess over the origins of a specific odor common to semiarid deserts and to exhort an assistant to uncover the hallucinogenic properties of Siberian reindeer urine. He has spent Christmases documenting New Guinean fertility rites on film. At the same time, he has never failed to attend to medical emergencies, write letters of recommendation or provide lodging on behalf of friends or their friends or their friends' children. And on the islands of Micronesia and Melanesia, where he achieved his most illustrious discoveries, there are libraries that would not exist and children who would not know how to read English were it not for the boxloads of books routinely sent overseas by Carleton Gajdusek.

His former colleagues in America speak of Gajdusek with a mix of awe, exasperated affection, sadness and discomfort. "Carleton is a person of great talents and

great defects," said Dr. Paul Brown, who was Gajdusek's closest friend while working with him for thirty years at the National Institutes of Health's Neurological Disorders & Stroke division in Bethesda, Maryland. "He's an absolute egoist who requires being the center of attention wherever he goes. On the other hand, he cares about people. That's evident despite the fact that he's an emotional dwarf. There's not the slightest streak of nongenerosity or pettiness to him. I accept his flaws and his attributes. Carleton's an exaggerated person. You don't need to exaggerate him."

Gajdusek's PATCHWORK FAMILY was a remarkable spectacle.

HOME FIRES: Surrounded by his adopted family, Gajdusek presides with a comfort that gives no hint of his dark urges.

In Yonkers, New York, Gajdusek's father was a Slovakian butcher and his mother a daughter of Hungarian immigrants who chose Homer, Sophocles, Plutarch and Virgil for her son's bedtime reading. By the time he was 10, the boy's biologist aunt had arranged for him to have free run of the Boyce Thompson Institute of Plant Research, where she worked. At the age of 15, he invented what would become the chemical basis for today's weed killer. By 19 he was attending Harvard Medical School, after which young Carleton Gajdusek made his way to the California Institute of Technology and there caught the attention of Nobel double laureate Linus Pauling. Decades later Pauling would consider Gajdusek worthy of taking over as scientific director of his institute, but Gajdusek had his own trajectory to follow.

The childhood that fathered the man's composition is a more obscure chapter. In addition to nurturing his brilliance, Gajdusek's childhood contained the origins of his emotional frailties, sexual confusion and determined egocentrism—all encased in the vessel of a boy who felt traumas that no adult intended to inflict, yet who would grow up to believe in such a thing as "nontraumatic sexuality" between adults and children.

Gajdusek's younger brother, Robert, an affable retired English professor in his early seventies, told me that their father, the butcher Karl, "was wonderfully proud of us as high achievers" but that as the breadwinner, he spent little time with his sons. As an adoptive father, Carleton Gajdusek would extol such parental detachment as a virtue: "The last thing I want of my kids is to have them live with me, near me or in any way dependent on me—even for love and advice. I want them off on their own, dependent on the world and finding the love they need wherever they may be. 'Family' and paternal ties can be crippling, and I certainly did not adopt these four dozen kids to cripple them."

Yet in a different entry, Gajdusek wrote wistfully, "As a child Daddy was not my confidant, not even my friend. I dreaded him, feared him—even despised him.... It was not to him I could turn with the stifling, bewildered confusions of my adolescence. Instead I had Mother, her 'understanding' and her comfort—but it was not a father's!" Robert Gajdusek praised their mother to me as being "totally given to us," yet to his brother such devotion felt oppressive.

When the family support structure did not suffice, he turned away from it. By the age of 9, he yearned to be a scientist. Louis Pasteur was his god, Paul de Kruif's *Microbe Hunters* his bible and the Boyce Thompson Institute of Plant Research his sterile Garden of Eden. As his own Adam, however, Gajdusek cut an uncertain figure. From preadolescence onward, he did not find himself attracted to or at ease around the opposite sex.

There had been an uncle, his father's brother, Kristal. Karl

CORBIS/BETTMAN-UPI

Gajdusek had brought his family home to his birthplace, a spa town just outside Bratislava, in 1929. During the course of their stay, 5-year-old Carleton bathed with Uncle Kristal, and he later wrote, "In the hot tubs with me, he fondled and hugged me very erotically and overtly and I clearly enjoyed it.... It produced excitement enough in me to cause a large erection." The moment was understandably significant—but not, he would insist, in a scarifying way. "I was proud that he liked to play with me in Slovakia," Gajdusek would explain in 1996 to a young man he himself had fondled. "He didn't *make* me that way. I was *glad*."

LIFE'S APOGEE: Carleton Gajdusek, *left*, accepting his Nobel Prize in Stockholm in 1976.

"Gajdusek was clever. He'd gone after the SHY KID."

It is impossible to know whether Uncle Kristal supplied a gratifying sexual awakening to his nephew or, as the statistical findings on child molesters begetting child molesters would lead us to believe, if the episode was damaging to Carleton Gajdusek's psyche. Gajdusek never told his younger brother about the incident. After completing his postdoctoral schooling in physical chemistry under Linus Pauling in 1949, Gajdusek followed his genius into the wilderness. He discovered that a hantavirus that had killed hundreds of American soldiers during the Korean War was identical to the hemorrhagic fever plaguing areas of Scandinavia, Russia and China. In Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey, he worked to arrest plagues and rabies. Gajdusek spent the mid-1950s at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne, Australia, helping to form the basis for the autoimmune-reaction study that would result in the awarding of the Nobel to the institute's director.

But Carleton Gajdusek's ego was not suited to understudy. When he learned, in 1954, that his former colleagues had been awarded a Nobel Prize in medicine, he would confess to his journal, "The news shatters me.... That I, with the capabilities I have, let them languish as I do, that I waste my energy on endeavors I myself despise, is what today has become intolerable to me." Thereafter Gajdusek pledged to stick with what he loved, pediatrics, until something truly worthy of his brilliance revealed itself. In March 1957, something did, and Gajdusek left Australia for the Eastern Highlands District of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, bent on figuring out the cause of the indigenous disease kuru, which was killing hundreds of island natives.

As his detractors would eagerly point out, Gajdusek did not discover kuru, nor did he solve its riddle singlehandedly. Yet the conquest of kuru was uniquely suited to the tenacity, the voracious curiosity and the cross-disciplinary intellect of Gajdusek. He flew into Port Moresby that spring and, undeterred by the primitive conditions, set up camp with a crude lab. He hired boy guides, made them interpreters and slowly penetrated dozens of distinct tribal tongues. He won the trust of chieftains who represented true Stone Age cultures, never before having seen a pencil or a mirror, much less the syringes from which Gajdusek coaxed blood samples. Though some of the societies consisted of headhunters and cannibals, the doctor betrayed neither fear nor superiority. From their conversations, Gajdusek began to formulate the disease pattern of kuru and thus eliminate suspects in the disease's murder mystery.

By 1965 Gajdusek and his National Institutes of Health (NIH) lab had documented that the islanders contracted kuru as a result of ritualized cannibalism—specifically, the eating of the brains of dead elders by women and children. That cannibalism might be linked to the disease had long

AP/WIDE WORLD

been speculated, but Gajdusek's findings stunned the medical world: Kuru was in fact a "slow virus" that infected the central nervous system over a very gradual period. Today the subject of slow viruses—*prions,* in current scientific parlance—is a dominant social preoccupation. It encompasses the study and treatment of AIDS, Alzheimer's, mad cow disease and other modern plagues. Today billions of dollars in research, thousands of jobs and millions of lives depend on the understanding of slow-acting viral diseases. And yet this entire field of medicine did not exist until a mere thirty-five years ago, when it evolved instantly, spectacularly, out of the nowhere that was Papua New Guinea and out of the obsessiveness of Carleton Gajdusek, whose eventual awarding, in 1976, of the Nobel Prize for medicine was a foregone conclusion.

But intellectual considerations alone did not explain Carleton Gajdusek's fascination with Papua New Guinea. He had encountered something else along the kuru trail: the Kukukuku, or Anga, tribe, a virtually Mesolithic society of tempestuous, highly intuitive Melanesians. As Gajdusek would note, theirs was "a culture in which pederasty—or pedophilia—has been institutionalized more thoroughly than in classical Helas." Preadolescent boys regularly fondled, were fondled by and engaged in oral sex with their male elders, after which "successful heterosexual adjustment occurs" and "jovial husbandry and tender paternity are the later outcome." The ribald flirtatiousness of the Kukukuku boys who greeted Gajdusek by reaching for his genitals and offering fellatio clearly amused the scientist. Far more gratifying to him, however, was their later heterosexual transformation. Here, if nowhere else, he decided, was proof that pedophilia could be "normal" and nondamaging.

In the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, work and play had solved the kuru riddle, and a personal riddle besides. Scribbled Carleton Gajdusek, at the end of his decadelong kuru sojourn: "For one of my temperament and psychological structure to have roamed from Badakhshan to Leningrad, from the Bolivian and Peruvian sources of the Amazon and Tarahumara barancas to the camps of Australian and Malayan aborigines, from the Polynesian islands and Micronesian atolls to the interior mountain rain forests of New Guinea to finally find this group…I leave a changed and different person."

ARRIVING SAN FRANCISCO SATURDAY WITH NEW GUINEA YOUNGSTER PAA FLIGHT 842. CARLETON

The telegram arrived one day in 1963 at the San Francisco office of a longtime colleague who would meet Gajdusek at the airport that Saturday. Accompanying the scientist was a 12-year-old barefoot Kukukuku boy from the Eastern Highlands village of Agabamatasa. His name was Mbagintao, he knew perhaps a couple of dozen words of English, and his physical ornamentation included a pencil slipped through his pierced nasal septum. Sixteen years later, Ivan Mbagintao would return to Papua New Guinea a college-educated man, trained in curating. Today he is the director of one of the Pacific Islands' most prestigious museums.

"Culture is cheap," Gajdusek liked to say—meaning you could airlift either Aristotle or a Stone Age urchin into New York and each would eventually adapt. For one so scornful of social straitjackets, it no doubt appealed to the subversive side of Gajdusek to lead dozens of primitives into the maw of Western culture with no ill effect. "You're playing a selfish, dirty game with these kids!" one man snarled at Gajdusek, remembers Dr. Joe Gibbs, the deputy chief of Gajdusek's lab at the NIH. But Gajdusek did not regard the children he brought to America and legally adopted as his laboratory rats any more than he touted his benevolence as pure altruism. The true attraction, as always, was youth.

From earliest adulthood, Gajdusek showed a knack for casual yet memorable bestowals of generosity on young boys. While touring postwar Germany's orphanages on a Red Cross pediatrics mission, he came upon a bright 12-year-old lad, the son of an orphanage's director, and made an offer to the boy's parents to bring him to America and tutor him all the way to college. Gajdusek made good on his offer, which, though a life-altering moment for the boy (who today is a successful 63-year-old Virginia businessman), was extended without emotional or sexual strings attached. Similarly, other boys he barely knew at first who accompanied him on meandering coast-to-coast drives through America and monthlong European rambles consistently deny today that Gajdusek wanted anything more from them than a curious mind, an attentive ear and the proximity of their everyday exuberance.

IN PRISON for a year, he published more than a dozen papers.

The catch to Gajdusek's patronage was that it faded as one's youth did. The American boys and young islanders who would at one time so entrance Gajdusek that he would fill his journals with descriptions of their coquettish smiles and frisky laughter would in young adulthood barely merit a fond hello. They were, as he termed them, "hangers-on" to be "divested of"—to be avoided, as he once avoided a lovely Australian clinical aide, refusing to marry her, since "the Andys, Toms, Wanevis, saucy Aleris, Ilyushas, Konstantines, Peotrs, Sinas, Remis, Akes, and Jorkers still steal all my attention and emotions and motivate my work to the extent that without them the work would suffer [and] I would not be 'me' "; as he once avoided a Chinese physician whom, Gajdusek confided to friends, he had married and impregnated with a son (though none of Gajdusek's associates or family members ever saw the boy before he supposedly died in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution), but whose doting ways impelled him to shoo her back to China because, he primly wrote, "As a rugged old bachelor, I prefer to be left alone."

Left alone, that is to say, with boys. That a man of compulsive generosity and galactically proportioned ego would take more than fifty poor, uncivilized Melanesian and Micronesian young males (and later a half dozen or so girls, as well) into his care and under his tutelage did not seem much of a stretch. To the hundreds of colleagues who visited his various homes (he relocated within Maryland as the number of residents grew, ultimately settling in the Frederick County village of Middletown), Gajdusek's patchwork family was a remarkable spectacle. Boys who had arrived in America without knowledge of what one did with a fork were now grocery shopping and cooking for what would seldom be fewer than twenty guests. Esteemed figures such as Margaret Mead took their places beside the islanders at the long refectory table. Gajdusek sometimes brought several of the boys with him on his worldwide travels, including to Stockholm in 1976 to witness the Nobel ceremonies. He buttressed their schoolwork with offerings of Dickens, Shakespeare, Austen and Tolstoy. Gajdusek drained all his savings to accommodate them, but his chief gift, "an eye-opening acquaintance with the culture of the West sufficient that they may avoid falling victims to it," was unquantifiable.

"I don't throw money around," Gajdusek said on the phone one March morning in 1996. "I give time. Time and attention.... I took care of the kids more than my mother and father and most other parents around here do. There's no question about that." But the person on the other end of the line, his 23-year-old adopted son Clay, did have questions, as relations between them had become tortured of late, necessitating this conversation, which the FBI happened to be taping.

Carleton is brilliant," said his former assistant Tatiana Prowell with abject fondness, "but you couldn't ask for a dumber criminal. He recorded everything he did, and he'd been living outside the law for a while." In Gajdusek's resident state of Maryland, the law holds that it is a crime for an adult to engage in sexual relations with an individual under the age of 16 or to have sex with someone under the age of 18 who is under the adult's legal care. Though Gajdusek's journals are filled with contemptuous remarks about the hypocrisies inherent in American laws, every society has its sexual taboos, and pedophilia seldom fails to make the list. Even in Gajdusek's beloved Kukukuku tribe, pedophilia was never practiced or discussed in the presence of females and never involved intercourse—and in any event, it was illegal under the laws of Papua New Guinea. (Though, as Gajdusek was wont to point out, such laws were the handiwork of foreign missionaries.)

"The DANCE TO ORGASM," he wrote, "is a game of childhood."

LIFE'S NADIR: Gajdusek, accused of molestation by one of his adopted sons, is arrested at his Maryland home in 1996 in front of a battery of reporters.

BILL GREEN/REUTERS/ARCHIVE

Gajdusek was discreet. Virtually all his sexual activities apparently took place on the islands and in countries such as the Philippines, where the laws of consent are less strict. Even before a prostate operation a decade ago rendered him impotent, Gajdusek claimed that he would "go for months and years without any." Despite living with dozens of youths over a thirty-year period, many of Gajdusek's adopted children would later insist in writing that their father had never sexually abused them and that such an accusation did not square with the man they knew.

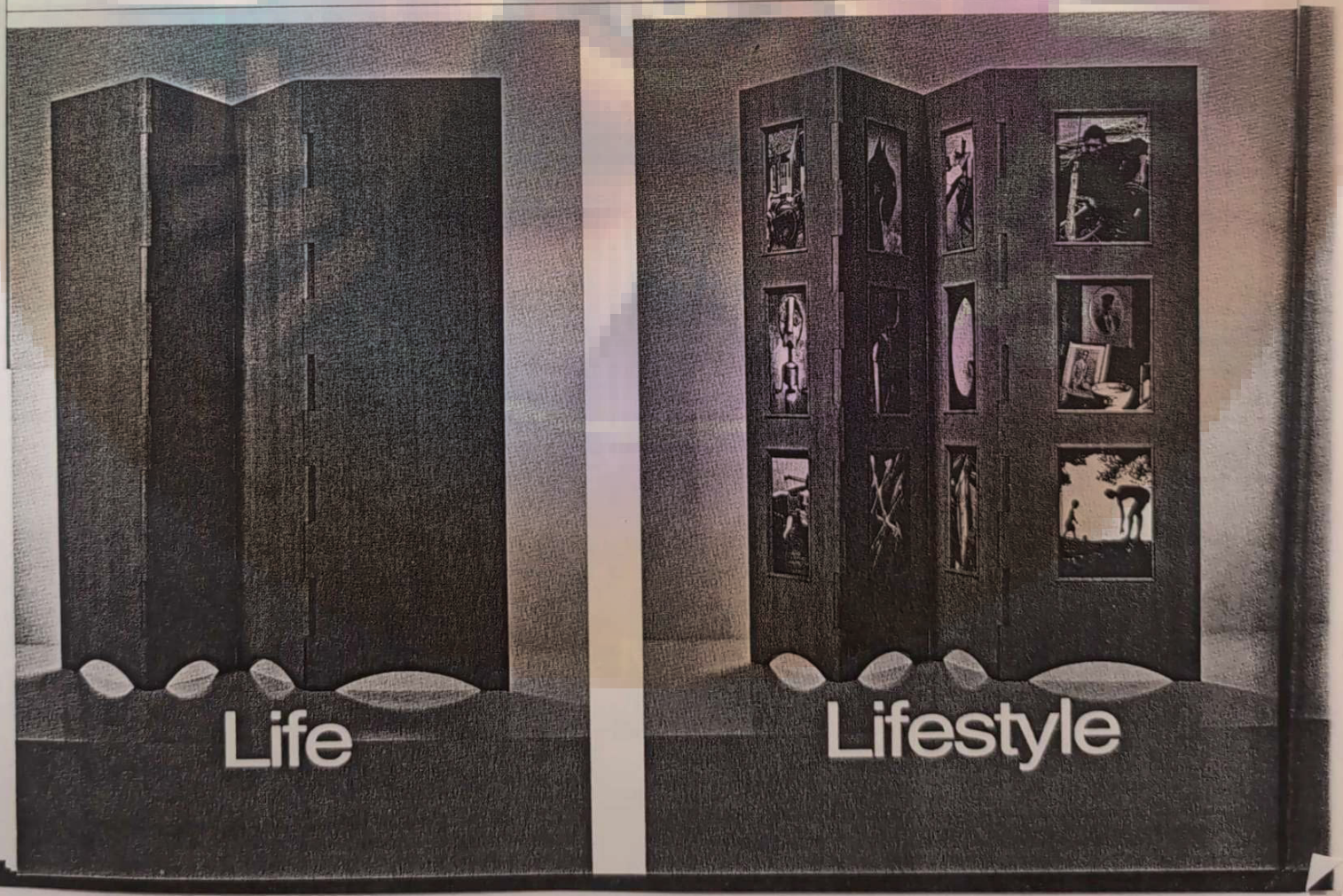
Even Gajdusek's journals describe his encounters only elliptically. "In these pages I cannot be frank," he would lament. Still, they leave not the slightest doubt as to his sexual identity. Owing to the journals' sheer volume and their at times suffocating self-importance, many of the friends to whom Gajdusek disseminated his journals say today that they never bothered to comb the contents. One who did, Dr.

John Edsall, 96, a former Harvard Medical School professor of Gajdusek's, confessed, "They made me somewhat uneasy. It didn't especially worry me, except that it might get him in trouble down the line."

Trouble arrived in a friendly guise—that is to say, in the form of youth. It's doubtful Gajdusek meant it personally the day he shot down a particular young scientist's research proposal. The rejection stung badly, however. The journals came to the young scientist's attention. He began to read them and to highlight incriminating passages. In 1995 the FBI opened an office in Calverton, Maryland, with a department in charge of investigating child pornography on the Internet. Operation Innocent Images would eventually result in some 10,000 subpoenas and nearly 300 arrests, but business was slow, perhaps too slow, by the time the estranged young scientist paid the Calverton office a visit. The FBI was all ears. A Nobel pedophile! "It was an attractive case, and the timing was right," admitted one of the lead investigators. "I know there came a point in time when we said, 'This case is going to put us on the map.' "

The FBI task force on the Gajdusek case included agents in Rockville, Maryland, who remembered that the scientist's name had come up in a previous investigation. In 1989 they had heard charges that two brothers whose father had been a medical colleague of Gajdusek's had been molested by the scientist nearly a quarter century before, when they were teenagers. Concerning one of the brothers, Gajdusek wrote in his journals of "betrayals, on both sides of the affair" and that "since his midadolescence it has been impossible to satisfy Joe's demands on me and he has never been able to settle for this. His condition is ominous." The investigators found Joe in the Lorton Correctional Facility in Fairfax County, Virginia, sentenced for assaulting a police officer. His allegations were too old and his credibility too shaky for the matter to be pursued back then. But the task force now had a fresh catalog of possible victims, courtesy of the young scientist, who furnished the agents with a list of Gajdusek's dozens of adoptees. Eventually, they came to Clay.

He had been 16 in 1989, when the scientist met him on the Ulithi Atoll, in Micronesia, and spoke to him of coming to America. Clay had previously been adopted in Micronesia, and he carried about him an aura of alienation. There was nothing to detain him on the islands. Those who came to know him in Maryland were impressed by his intelligence and his aloofness—how little interest he had in his native culture, how pronouncedly he withdrew from the other boys. It is difficult to say how much of his identity problems stemmed from his relationship with his adopted father, who, on Clay's first morning in America, engaged him in *sir-sir,* Outer Islands slang for "masturbation," and later repeated this activity, along with fellatio, frequently during the next four years.



Clay was reluctant to press charges. He was already in a state of despondency and struggling through college (for which Gajdusek was paying the tuition), and the very topic of pedophilia brought him shame, regardless of how his island forefathers viewed it. "He just hung his head that first time, and we got nowhere," remembered Scott Rolle, the Frederick County state attorney whom the federal investigators contacted to prosecute the case. "It didn't look like a case of physical force, but one of psychological intimidation. Gajdusek was clever. He'd gone after the shy, withdrawn kid."

On March 15, 1996, Clay at last gave in to the FBI's persuasions and sat in his college dorm with a tape recorder rigged to his telephone. Reaching Gajdusek at his office, Clay told his adopted father that investigators had approached him. Then he said, "I want to know why you did it to me."

Gajdusek was taken aback. He switched to a private line. (What follows is a transcription, published for the first time, of a conversation that was legally taped by the FBI.) "Look, Clay," he began. "I am not married. I basically…am gay. If you don't know that, you're a fool.… I'm not chasing you to have sex with you or anybody else. If you go on and talk to people about that, you're going to get us in so much trouble that you're going to close the life down for the kids at college, close my accounts down. I'll have to go out of the country."

"Don't you know that what you did to me possibly has to do with a lot of why I'm so disturbed while I'm here in America?" asked Clay. Gajdusek professed that what they had done was normal. "I was trying to help you, Clay," he said. "I love you. That's the way I express my love.… Love and sex are connected. When you love somebody, you want to make them happy."

Unaware that he was being led down a prosecutorial checklist, the doctor made his admissions. Yes, he had engaged in sex with other boys before—though only one here in America, and that boy had been from a culture of pedophilia, which Gajdusek well knew, since he and the boy's father had enjoyed relations years ago, back on the islands. Yes, he had perhaps touched Clay's penis with his lips. Yes, he knew what a pedophile was: "I am one.… There are a group of us who prefer young bodies, yes." And, yes, he would like for Clay to lie to the authorities about what had taken place. Throughout, the doctor's voice registered nervousness—but more noticeably, dismay and sadness. He could not believe the boy was so hostile about their time together. He could not believe that, for the boy, it had not been fun.

On April 4, 1996, Gajdusek flew back from Europe to Dulles Airport, where customs officials detained him without explanation for nearly an hour. It did not surprise him, then, to see his NIH colleague Paul Brown waiting for him at the airport with the news that the FBI had raided their

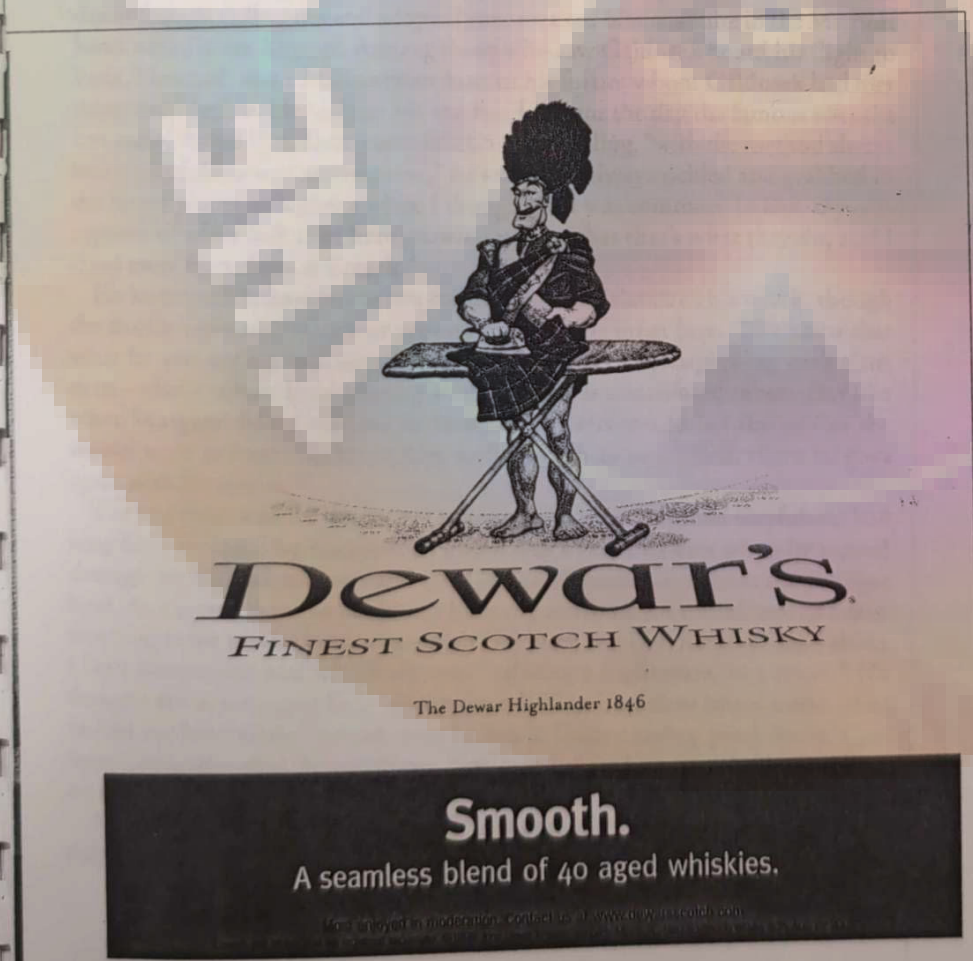
offices that morning. Investigators surveilled Gajdusek and Brown all the way back to Middletown, where, at the driveway to Gajdusek's house, several cars materialized out of nowhere and surrounded his rental vehicle. Guns were drawn. The front door to the house flew open and more officials stepped out. The two men were ordered to stand spread-eagle against their car. Just then a Baltimore television crew, presumably tipped off by the FBI, rolled up and captured footage of the corpulent septuagenarian getting the Public Enemy Number One treatment. Later, asked if this wasn't excessive, state attorney Scott Rolle asserted that the methods were routine. Then Rolle shrugged and added, "On the other hand, he was a pedophile. How *could* it be excessive?"

Said the father to his adopted son in a letter dated August 12, 1996:

> The trap on the phone you engineered for me with the FBI succeeded terribly well. I have the tape of it. I will surely get a long jail sentence, which I may not survive. There is no longer much for me to live for.... I am and will be able to answer quickly anything you ask and write in reply to anything you ask or tell me about—even our troubles together and travails, your career and education, our sex play and homosexuality, bisexuality and comparative psychosexual development, about which I know a great deal, and even about the problems of my arrest and trial, my inextricable predicament, the response of the world scientific community and our colleagues and friends. But I cannot yet get permission to send you these replies I will write without danger of being charged with trying to influence you as the witness against me—now the only one for the pending trial—and with thus trying to "obstruct justice." Thus, I am not granted the freedom which Socrates had in Ancient Athens of discourse and discussion with Meletus, Amytus and Lycon, his accusers, of corrupting the young of Athens....
>
> You wanted more than the other kids to be like your schoolmates and American friends, and in some way you resented being in our strange family or identified as a Micronesian. This saddened me and worried me. You enjoyed any *sirsir* we played at together and certainly never repulsed me or said 'no,' but playfully continued. I am sure you were having acceptable fun as I was. It went on in your adult life *after* you were 18—but in your island culture such an age line is ridiculous. I thank you for the fun...mutual fun....
>
> I love you still. I understand how you yielded under the interrogations, persistent coercion, embarrassment and shame, bribery and trickery of the FBI and police inquisition trying to trap me. I would like to learn from you the source of your ambivalence *[sic]* love-hate relationship with me, and why we could not work it out together. I wish you well, and that you gain, someday, true morality and wisdom.
>
> With love,
> Carleton

Clay read the letter. Then he dutifully carried it over to the office of state attorney Scott Rolle, who had agreed to pick up the rest of Clay's college tuition, plus assorted other bills. And thereby did Carleton Gajdusek go the way of Socrates.

For months he spoke openly of committing suicide. It was not the stigma, he said, for he had nothing whatsoever to be ashamed of—and indeed, when a colleague from the NIH visited him to express deep sympathies, Gajdusek treated him to a lecture about fellatio and semen drinking among the Anga youth. In a way, the whole fiasco was laughable. That brigade of FBI agents reenacting something out of Kafka as they sat in a basement combing through his journals for any and all pedophilic references. State attorney Rolle mounting on his wall, like the head of an exotic beast, a large framed sketch of Gajdusek being arraigned in his blue prison jumpsuit. The jackals in the



media yapping, *Dr. Gajdusek! Are you a pedophile, Dr. Gajdusek?*

He took a copy of *The Last Days of Socrates* with him to the April 29, 1997, sentencing, where, in exchange for a guilty plea, Carleton Gajdusek was handed an eighteen-month prison sentence, of which he would serve twelve months—a seemingly light punishment, but one that still amounted to a victory for Rolle, given Rolle's belief that the state's lone witness, Clay, would not have held up well on the witness stand. As he turned to be led off, Gajdusek noticed a slight figure standing at the back of the courtroom. It was Clay. The smile that materialized on the scientist's face as he beheld his adopted son was, in the words of one observer, "almost beatific."

Somewhere along the way during his year at the Frederick County Detention Center, Carleton Gajdusek turned a psychological corner. He did not once visit the recreation yard, where he feared attack. His dealings with the FBI had left him paranoid. When visitors sat before him and asked him questions on the visitation phone, Gajdusek, fearing his words would again be recorded, wrote his replies, holding the paper up to be read through the Plexiglas. But the year was enormously productive: more than a dozen research papers published, thousands of journal pages written. The work *had* gone on. And, as his correspondence to friends seldom failed to mention, Gajdusek was in fine company among the thinkers and the martyrs, done in by so-called civilized society.

"Carleton's done a FAIR AMOUNT of damage in his life."

The doctor emerged in April 1998, obese and barely able to walk. Several dozen friends, colleagues and adopted sons awaited him at a suite in the Marriott hotel near Dulles Airport. Among those who saw Gajdusek board his flight to Paris, I learned, was a Micronesian man in his forties whom Gajdusek had met thirty years before. He had not yet reached his teens the day the famous scientist first masturbated him. Later came fellatio and fondling, "with the method always being playfulness and amusement," he said. "He always tickled and grabbed in the funny places, and after a while I thought that was common. In fact, my perception of white folk over here growing up was that that's what they do, and I shied away from them as a result."

He knew such behavior was not common on the islands of his youth, though the doctor often said otherwise around him and the other boys. "We knew that what he was saying was not quite true," he said. "Adults playing with children—that's taboo. Even playing with yourself is considered taboo. But like when Margaret Mead was out in Samoa, the natives told her the stories she would want to hear. We knew him well enough to say, 'Well, there he goes again with his stories.' "

The boy never told the doctor not to touch him. But the initial playfulness had long been replaced by discomfort, and it was a relief to him when he passed through his high school years and saw Gajdusek's attention turn to the younger boys. As a grown man, he could not honestly attribute his moodiness or heavy drinking to the private encounters with Gajdusek. He did, however, read about Clay's accusations and felt like he was "reliving a nightmare, in a sense." He thought about arranging for a meeting to tell Clay, his fellow Micronesian, that he had not been alone. Instead, here he was at Dulles, saying good-bye to Carleton Gajdusek—and, he would say, "feeling relief for him, but also hoping that no more damage would be done to any of the boys."

And how to calculate the damage? It is as amorphous as a child's "consent" is dubious. Arbitrary as any society's laws may seem to Gajdusek and other social

COULD YOU
fill our shoes?

Paraboot®
DEPUIS 1919

SAKS FIFTH AVENUE
BARNEYS
MITCHELL'S OF WESTPORT
I.K. DON- CHICAGO
SILVERFEET- SOUTH COAST PLAZA
MARIO'S PORTLAND